

The Lesson Design of Extensive Reading Teaching

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Abstract. Reading, especially Extensive Reading, is an important skill in the L2 acquisition. Extensive Reading is also a required course of FL teaching in universities. To achieve a good method of teaching Extensive Reading, a lesson design is necessary. This paper tries to illustrate the lesson design of Extensive Reading teaching through viewing the role of Extensive Reading in language learning, concluding a better definition of Extensive Reading and reviewing the methods put forward by scholars both home and abroad, thus proposing a way to the lesson design of the in-class and extra-curricular teaching of Extensive Reading.

Introduction

“Reading is a comprehensive skill because it concerns the recognition of the configuration, pronunciation, grammatical inflection and the comprehension of words, sentences and paragraphs” (Wei Liming & Sun Changshun, 2001:209). It is categorized roughly into Intensive and Extensive Reading. As for the Intensive Reading, many scholars have already developed many approaches suitable to Chinese learners. However, the teaching methods concerning Extensive Reading, though many scholars at home and abroad have done some investigations on it, are hardly suitable to many college learners in China. Many learners complain that Extensive Reading is a useless course except consulting dictionary for a large abundance of vocabulary and a waste of time. To solve the problem, it is necessary to design the teaching of Extensive Reading both in and out of classroom teaching. This paper tries to illustrate the teaching design of Extensive Reading through viewing the role of Extensive Reading in language learning, concluding a better definition of Extensive Reading and reviewing the methods proposed by scholars both at home and abroad, thus proposing a way to the lesson design of the in-class and extra-curricular teaching of Extensive Reading.

The Role of Extensive Reading in Language Learning

Michael West (1955:45) described the purpose of his “New Method Supplementary Readers” as “to confer greater facility in the use of the vocabulary already gained, to give the child a sense of achievement and a taste of the pleasure to be derived from his accomplishment”. Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in Extensive Reading, perhaps as a result of insights from SLA studies into the role and nature of input in the learning process. Many scholars abroad (Hafitz and Tudor, 1989; Robb and Susser, 1989) launched a variety of programmes to test the role of Extensive Reading in language learning. They finally concluded: “If the extensive reading procedure is as effective as the skills procedure in terms of test scores, the implications for the teaching of FL/EFL reading are profound. By reading what they choose and (more or less) enjoying their homework, students’ motivation to learn will increase, which will in turn benefit their eventual acquisition of the target language” (Robb & Sutter, 1989:248). Thus, Extensive Reading provides more opportunities for the learners to contact the target language and to learn more skills for future communication. Moreover, learners can learn more knowledge other than language through Extensive Reading.

Raj and Hunt (1990) summarize the role of Extensive Reading as the following 4 points: Through Extensive Reading, learners are exposed to written English; by Extensive Reading, students are motivated to read and inculcate in them the reading habit; with the help of Extensive Reading, learners can develop their language proficiency through materials that can enrich learning; elements of literature can be introduced into language teaching via Extensive Reading.

The role of Extensive Reading is obvious in target language learning. It can not only improve the learners' language knowledge in the language system, but also cultivate the four basic language skills of students. Meanwhile, other knowledge beyond language can also be acquired through the teaching of Extensive Reading. The opportunities that Extensive Reading affords learners of all ages and levels of language proficiency make it a useful resource. Learners can build their language competence, progress in their reading ability, become more independent in their studies, acquire cultural knowledge, and develop confidence and motivation to carry on learning. With young learners there is a further value. Introducing children to books, whether in their first or a second language, contributes to the curriculum objective of encouraging critical thinking and positive attitudes towards imaginative experience.

A Better Definition of Extensive Reading

As the role of Extensive Reading in language learning is so important, a key issue emerging from research studies has been that of defining exactly what is really meant by the term "Extensive Reading". There is a lack of consensus among scholars on the subject. Some use the term confusingly to describe skimming and scanning activities. Others relate it to quantity of material. Yet others specify time or "individual silent reading periods in class". Clearly the precise nature of Extensive Reading will vary student motivation and institutional resources. Hedge (2002) summarizes the ideal characterization of Extensive Reading as "reading large quantities of material, whether short stories and novels, newspaper and magazine articles, or professional reading; reading consistently over time on a frequent and regular basis; reading longer texts of the types listed in the first point above; reading for general meaning, primarily for pleasure, curiosity, or professional interest; reading longer texts during class time but also engaging in individual, independent reading at home, ideally of self-selected material."

The aim of Extensive Reading is described by Hafiz and Tudor (1989: 5) as: "...to 'flood' learners with large quantities of L2 input with few or possibly no specific tasks to perform on this material. The pedagogical value attributed to extensive reading is based on the assumption that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful and interesting L2 material will, in the long run, produce a beneficial effect on the learners' command of the L2."

With the aim and contents of Extensive Reading, it can be roughly divided into Broad and Narrow Extensive Reading. In a broad sense, it is the kind of reading beyond the Intensive Reading, including any other kind of reading that appeals to the readers of all ages. In a narrow sense, it is a course in FL teaching that usually starts in senior high school. What this paper deals with is a required course in FL teaching in universities, thus can be defined as: Extensive Reading is an obligatory course of FL curricula in universities with the aim of developing reading skills, increasing the reading speed and enlarging vocabulary with large quantities of L2 input by sufficient reading materials of target language, thus enables the learners to arouse and keep interest in reading and to enlarge horizon. This definition can best illustrate the role, aim and contents of Extensive Reading as a course in FL teaching.

Approaches of Extensive Reading at Home and Abroad

As the role of Extensive Reading is of vital importance in target language learning and it is an obligatory course in FL teaching, many scholars have put forward many approaches in teaching Extensive Reading. Here a few will be mentioned to gain a general view on the teaching of Extensive Reading:

The first one is the SQ3R Technique. This technique is put forward by Robinson (1964). It is suitable to both Extensive Reading and Intensive Reading. It consists of five steps: Survey (S), Question (Q), Read(R), Recite(R) and Review(R). *Survey* means to skim the text to make sure that it is relevant and to get an overview of the main points. *Question* indicates to ask yourself questions you want the text to answer. It also involves prediction. The aim is to get a general idea of the material and

the activities can be done by both teachers and learners themselves. *Read* refers to reading carefully for comprehension. The aim is to develop the learners' reading comprehension ability and to enlarge their vocabulary. *Recite* is to reprocess in some way the salient points gained from the text. In the meanwhile, recite some excellent wordings and store them for future use. The aim is to develop the abilities of other language skills in target language through Extensive Reading. *Review* is to think about what you have learnt, and organize the information in your mind, consider its implications for other things you know, assess its importance and so on. The aim is to integrate it into your previous knowledge and experience.

The second one is the Techniques of *Skimming* and *Scanning*. *Skimming* and *scanning*, which are very useful skills of reading and often discussed in the teaching of Extensive Reading, are sometimes used indiscriminately by some teachers. *Skimming* is a fast reading technique which skips details, minor ideas, examples, etc., with an attempt to get the general idea of the content, the highlights of the article, and the principal thoughts of the author or anything of special interest to the readers in the book. It requires the readers to note only information and clues that provide an idea of the central theme of topic. The information and clues can be some selected sentences or some textual clues. By *scanning*, it means glancing rapidly through a text either to search for a specific piece of information or to get an initial impression of whether the text is suitable for a given purpose. The Techniques of *Skimming* and *Scanning* are useful in fast reading. They are not quite suitable for the comprehensive teaching of Extensive Reading as a course, thus a better design of teaching Extensive Reading both in and out of classroom is necessary.

The Lesson Design of Extensive Reading Teaching

As the role of Extensive Reading has become more and more important, and the techniques above-mentioned are not always applicable in the teaching of Extensive Reading, it is necessary to find a good design of teaching of Extensive Reading. As for the syllabus design, Widdowson (1999:154) points out the criteria: "To my mind, what is crucial is that the principles upon which the syllabus has been designed, whether in terms of structures, notions, functions, topics, or tasks, should be made quite explicit so that teachers can submit them to appraisal and application." And some scholars put forward proposals for task-based teaching for syllabus design (Long, 1985). The criterion of the design in this paper is therefore, on the task-based teaching.

As is known to all, the task of Extensive Reading cannot be solely accomplished in the specified class hour. Hence, the designing of teaching of Extensive Reading may include that of in-class and extra-curricula teaching.

In-class teaching of Extensive Reading is crucial and necessary for the learners to develop their various abilities in target language learning. With yearly experiences of teaching, a "BASIC" way of teaching Extensive Reading is put forward as the basic lesson design of in-class teaching. It consists of five steps: Background (B), Asking (A), Scanning (S), Investigating (I) and Conclusion (C). The first step is *Background*. Background knowledge is essential for the learners to better understand the selected material. It can not only provide sufficient and complementary material to promote learners' comprehension, but enlarge their knowledge as well. It can include the background of the author, selected materials and allusions in them, the important historical figures and events and famous geographical places in the material. This task can be done by the teachers to find the relevant materials as well as by the learners themselves and can be demonstrated by both learners and teachers. This step can take up 20% of class hour. The second step is *Asking*. This is the pre-reading step. The task is mainly done by the teachers to ask some relevant questions concerning the selected materials. The questions can embrace those of background, comprehension, vocabulary, etc. The answers to the questions can either be definite ones or indefinite. This task can also be accomplished by the learners themselves according to the titles of the selected materials through "inter-attacking skills" (asking each other questions) and "intra-attacking skills" (asking themselves question). This step occupies 10% of class hour. The third step is *Scanning*. This is the while-reading step. The task is primarily finished by the learners. According to the questions asked before reading, the learners should read the

selected materials to find the relevant answers to the questions. The purpose of this step is to ask the learners to read the selected material extensively to get the general ideas. This step can take up either 15% of class hour if the selected materials are relatively shorter, or 20% of class hour if vice versa. The fourth step is *Investigating*. This is the after-reading step. By investigating, it means to find out the trouble and difficult points concerning reading. The task can be done by teachers and learners respectively. The trouble and difficult points are involved in the vocabulary problems, comprehension problems, reading skill problems, etc. The problems can be investigated by the learners, and the teacher may offer the solution directly or organize a class discussion to find out a solution, thus promoting the interaction between the teacher and the learner. This is a comprehensive step to develop various abilities of the learners for their target language learning, hence can occupy longer period of class hour, about 40%. The last step is *Conclusion*. This is the last but not the least important step of the whole process. The task is mainly done by the teacher. A good summary can give the learners profound impression on what they have acquired. It can involve all the points covering the selected reading materials and solutions found by the teachers and the learners. The learners can also draw the conclusion of what they have gained through the guidance of the teacher. This step will take up 10—15% of class hour. By such designing of in-class teaching of Extensive Reading, learners can obtain both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge of the target language.

As a supplementary design for the in-class teaching of Extensive Reading, the lesson design of extra-curricular teaching is of necessity because the class hour of Extensive Reading course is rather limited and insufficient. Therefore an *ABC* method is proposed for the design of extra-curricular teaching of Extensive Reading with *A* for *Assignment*, *B* for *Book-report* and *C* for *Comments*. Apart from in-class teaching, the teacher should pour more reading materials upon the learners. *Assignment* is the first step for the design of extra-curricular teaching of Extensive Reading. There are various kinds of assignment. The teacher can offer the same reading material to all the learners or different materials to individuals. The contents of the assignment may embrace comprehension training, vocabulary accumulating, reading-skill developing and knowledge enlarging. After the teachers set the assignment, certain kinds of check should be made for extra-curricular reading. The best form could be that of *book-report*. Here the book is a general term referring to any kind of reading materials, including newspaper, magazines, novels, etc. The report can be taken both in oral and written way and can be done collectively or individually according to different tasks. The contents of the book-report may cover every aspect of the assignment. This step is of extreme importance in extra-curricular teaching of Extensive Reading because without checking, the assignment can only be an empty plan and no goals will be achieved through extra-curricular teaching. After the first two tasks, the teacher should make some *comments* on it. The comments made by the teacher can be carried out in class hour if the assignment is the same, otherwise, they should be done individually to the learners. The contents of comments consist of book-report grading, reading ability assessment, vocabulary testing and reading habit developing. It is the communication between the teacher and the learners concerning reading abilities of the learners. By such design of extra-curricular teaching of Extensive Reading, the learners gradually form the habit of reading, and through reading the learners can finally achieve the goal of target language acquisition.

In a word, a good syllabus design of Extensive Reading is helpful to language learning. By combining the in-class teaching and extra-curricular teaching of Extensive Reading, the learners will gain much knowledge of reading skills, accumulate a large amount of vocabulary, develop their comprehension abilities, foster the habit and interest of reading and obtain much knowledge beyond language. In the long run, the aims of teaching Extensive Reading will be arrived at and the goals of target language learning will be achieved.

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